

# OUR FIRST FORTY YEARS



**Grove Housing Association Ltd**

1977 - 2017

Grove Housing Association has always prided itself in being responsive to the needs of its tenants and the local community and has demonstrated both the capacity and will to overcome challenges, supporting many people through difficult times. Grove HA is committed to using all available resources to help in delivering a simple stated purpose: **“to provide quality affordable homes in the Grove area and improve the standard of life in the community”**.

In 2016, a Tenant's Satisfaction Survey was conducted in which the question was asked: “How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by Grove HA?” to which an overwhelming 88% responded that they were “very satisfied”. Grove HA remains committed to supporting further investment in high quality services for residents; to providing the resources to build affordable homes for local people and to introduce new community initiatives to strengthen social cohesion for the benefit of all Grove residents.

## A Word from our Tenants

Arosa resident **Esther Lunn** has spent most of her adult life in the Grove area. Originally from the Shankill Road, Esther moved with her family at a young age to Skegoneill as her mother owned a grocery store at the corner of Arosa Parade. After briefly living in Rathcoole when she got married, Esther and her husband moved to a property at Harrisburg Street which her father bought for them for the sum of £250. The young couple repaid the loan at £1 a week and Esther can still recall the condition of the property when they first moved in: “The interior of the house was completely wrecked and I was pregnant with my third child at the time. The previous occupants had taken a hammer to the floor and smashed up some of the tiles, there was oil cloth on the floors, broken glass from the windows in the kitchen and the wardrobes were lying in pieces in the bedrooms. My father and my husband both worked on the property and we made it into a home. We got a loan to put in a shower, toilet and a tiny sink as we had no bathroom and the roof space was converted into a third bedroom. In 1999 the property was vested and I was initially offered a house on Glasgow Street, before eventually moving into a new property in Arosa when Grove Housing Association acquired 40 homes from the developer”.



Arosa resident Esther Lunn

When **Kelly Donaghy** found herself homeless with two young children, she could never have imagined that Grove Housing Association was about to offer her a new home just in time for Christmas. As Kelly explains: “I approached Grove Housing Association and was offered a property on the Shore Road within a week of that first contact. It was six weeks before Christmas (2016) and I remember getting everyone round to help decorate as I wanted moved in straight away and since then I have concentrated on making it my home. My children are more settled now and I feel like this property was just meant for us. I won't be giving it up for anybody – to be in a house that has everything and not to have a single problem wrong with it is the best feeling ever”.



On 5th May this year, Grove Housing Association will be marking 40 years since it was first registered as a housing association with the Department of the Environment. Major anniversaries, such as this, offer a perfect opportunity for reflection, and as Chairperson of Grove Housing Association, I am delighted to present this special publication which charts the history, progress and achievements of this organisation through the decades.

I trust that for those new to the area, this publication will help to illustrate what conditions were like in Grove in the early years when three quarters of households lacked something as simple as a shower or a wash hand basin. Equally, I hope that it will also provide a welcome trip down memory lane for our more established residents who have known this area since early childhood.

The Association recognises the importance of engaging with the local community and is fully committed to strengthening these relationships and helping people to improve their situation and that of their children. We will continue to develop and promote projects such as the Community Garden and will work to strengthen existing partnerships and create new ones with the statutory and community/voluntary sectors.

I pay tribute to those individuals who helped to found Grove Housing Association and in this our anniversary year we honour their foresight, integrity and ability to get a locally-based housing association off the ground to give help and hope to the many people who found themselves in housing need.

In particular I wish to acknowledge the work of my predecessor, David Browne, for the contribution that he made in the growth and development of Grove Housing Association.

I would also like to thank all of my colleagues on the Board of Management who volunteer their commitment, time and expertise; our members of staff for providing a first class service to all our tenants; the Government departments for their confidence in our organisation, the funding provided and for their oversight of it; the builders, architects and other consultants who have provided quality construction and repair services, and above all I applaud the commitment of the local community to working with us to ensure that Grove Housing Association remains at the forefront of housing and community development in North Belfast.

**Philip Oliver**, Chairperson



Former Chairperson  
David Browne

Grove Housing  
Association's office  
at 171 York Road





A BRIEF HISTORY

Belfast in the nineteen seventies was a very different place than it is today. Statistics from the time show that the city had much worse housing conditions than the UK average. This housing blight and the spread of blocked up properties that was evident in North Belfast was attributed to a number of factors.

These included the general effect of rent restriction over a protracted period of time which had discouraged landlords from adequately maintaining their properties; the absence of standard amenities from virtually every house in the area; the overwhelming dominance of two-bedroom houses which had led families with children to move away from Grove to obtain accommodation better suited to their needs and a ‘domino effect’ where properties, once vacated, were often broken into and stripped of any valuable materials leading to the residents of adjoining properties moving out as well.



Houses on Ivan Street looking towards the Grove Baths, September 1979

In order to tackle these problems, large areas of the city had been designated as “Housing Redevelopment Areas” by the former Belfast County Borough Council, and then later by the Housing Executive when it became Northern Ireland’s public housing authority in 1971. The Grove area had been omitted from the redevelopment strategy for the city, and the problem of substandard housing in the area had been compounded even further by uncertainty over the exact routes of proposed major roads. Grove suffered from this “planning blight” until the authorities eventually chose a site further from the city centre at Fortwilliam for the first intersection of the M2.

The mass demolition of large areas of housing was opposed as it was thought to contribute to the displacement and breakup of families and communities, and in January 1976 the NIHE Works Department published a report proposing a number of Pilot Rehabilitation Areas, one of which was Grove. Legislation quickly followed and Housing Action Areas - small areas of existing housing where urgent action was needed to deal with both housing and social stress - were created under the Housing (NI) Order 1976.



Childhood memories - Marie McMillen and the late Jim Davidson from Arosa Parade pictured in 1979

“There would have been no Grove Housing but for Frank Millar”

Following the publication of the Pilot Rehabilitation Report, an approach was made by the late Frank Millar, a Belfast City Councillor, to Erskine Holmes, a fellow elected representative and Director of the new Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) seeking assistance to form a locally-based housing association.

The Housing (NI) Order 1976 had paved the way for existing and newly-formed housing associations to be registered with the Department of the Environment making them eligible to receive Housing Association Grant (HAG) for housing-related activities. Additionally, more generous grants were introduced to help owner occupiers and private landlords to repair and improve their homes and properties.

Archived reports from the time note that: **“There is ample scope for locally formed associations to take the initiative for rehabilitation in particular areas of the City, or to work alongside the Executive in the Pilot Rehabilitation Areas. It is fair to say that the role of the association will very largely be determined by their willingness and capacity to be involved. The scale of the problem is enormous.”**

Councillor Millar was instrumental in arranging a meeting with local residents and voluntary/community workers from the area and Grove Housing Association was registered as an Industrial & Provident Society on **14th October, 1976**.

THE FORMATION OF GROVE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The signatories to the original Association Rules are listed as follows:

Frank Millar	Tommy McCready
W Allen	Sidney Glenn
Peggy McIlwaine	Robert Whitten
Herbie Bowles	Harry Wright

On **5th May, 1977**, Grove Housing Association became the 14th housing association in Northern Ireland to be registered with the Department of the Environment.



Pictured in the Grove Community Centre in 1981 are (l-r) Graham Spence & Jim Smith (Architects); Bertie McTrusty (Grove HA Committee Member ); David Mitchell MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State); Tommy McCready (Grove HA Committee Member); Frank Millar (Chairman); Ruth Spence, Harry Wright & Peggy McIlwaine (Grove HA Committee Members); Peter Frizzell (Quantity Surveyor); Ken McMillen (Contractor); Chris Williamson (Grove HA Development Officer) & Dessie Hawthorne (Quantity Surveyor)



**“Grove can become a successful Housing Action Area due to the improvement potential of its houses, the strong self-help attitude of its residents and the work of its housing association”** – Extract from the Housing Action Area Report for Grove HA January 1978

The main priority for Grove HA was to have the area declared a Housing Action Area in order to obtain full administrative, legal and financial assistance to improve it both physically and socially. The proposed Housing Action Area contained 645 dwellings and a substantial number of other buildings including shops, public houses, halls, social clubs, office, garages and factories, covering a geographical area of some 30 acres, lying 1.5 miles from the city centre and bounded by York Road to the West, the Railway to the East, Crusaders Football Ground to the North and to the South by the BOCM Silcox plant at North Derby Street.

Former Grove committee member **Kay Brown** was first introduced to life in Grove when she met and married her husband who was from Bute Street in 1963. The couple set up home in No. 13 Bute Street where Kay remained until she secured her present accommodation at York Road in 2001. Reflecting on life on Bute Street in the late 1970's, Kay recalls: “There were a number of houses where the families had moved out and these had been bricked up but it was always a good street, you knew your neighbours and they were happy homes, happy times. I remember



Kay Brown in her York Road home

the properties being renovated by Grove Housing Association and we moved to St Aubyn Street while the work was being carried out. We got our first bathroom built out in the rear yard with a shower fitted. I always liked Bute Street, everyone worked hard but there was a great sense of community spirit”.



Nos. 1-39 Fife Street, September 1979

During the summer of 1977, committee members of Grove Housing Association conducted a questionnaire/survey of Grove's area of operation. The survey found that only 7% of the households interviewed had the use of all five standard amenities ie. a fixed bath or shower; an internal WC; a wash hand basin; a sink and hot and cold running water at three or more points. Much more important, however, was the fact that a startling 76% of the households lacked four of these five basic amenities. However, the one standard amenity which was present in virtually every house was a kitchen sink!

A Housing Action Area Report was produced and accepted in January 1978 leading to the development of a Housing Action Area Plan. A year later in November 1979 the Grove Housing Action Area was declared by the Housing Executive. The aim of the Housing Action Area was to make it easier for owners and private landlords to draw down grant assistance and to make it easier for Grove HA to acquire and improve homes where others were unable to do so. The Housing Action Area status was intended to last for only five years but was extended by a further four years.

On 2nd April, 1977, Grove Housing Association made its first official purchase of a property when it secured No. 63 Glasgow Street for the princely sum of £600. The most expensive of the 23 houses bought that first year cost £1,750 and the cheapest £143. The majority of these were rehabilitated as the aim of the Housing Action Area was to improve existing homes and keep communities together.

Property valuations were set by the District Valuer and they were by no means generous, but in Grove's early years landlords were often willing to sell portfolios of houses that were unprofitable due to rent control legislation dating back to the First World War. Initially there were frustrating delays while the Action Area Plan was awaiting final approval by the Housing Executive. This meant that the majority of the houses bought during 1977 were renovated during 1979. Grove Housing Association used this time to make secure those properties which had been subject to vandalism and demolish those declared unsafe, such as the terrace at 2-18 Glasgow Street. Considerable time was also spent developing projects, doing design work, getting grant approval from the Department and tendering the schemes. This set the pattern for future years and in all 211 properties were rehabilitated between 1979 and 1990.

A total of 156 houses were bought by agreement up to 1990, and since then a further 23 existing dwellings have been bought. In addition to purchasing by agreement, there was compulsory acquisition of 280 houses through the vesting process in a programme running between 1979 and 1987. The District Valuer's compensation was poor, but if owners objected, their properties were generally removed from the Vesting Order.

**“Houses in the area are fundamentally sound and Grove Housing Association has developed to the point where it can make rapid progress in tackling housing stress there. The formalities of registering the Association have been completed, a full-time member of staff has been appointed, and a steady stream of properties is being purchased”.**



No 6 Harrisburg Street after rehabilitation



Rehabilitation work gets underway at 19 Shore Road, 1984



The decision was taken to demolish a number of properties on Glasgow Street, Ritchie Street, Ivan Street and St Vincent Street as they were simply in too poor a condition to renovate, and a total of 40 new homes were constructed on these sites between the years 1983 and 1986, keeping to the original street layouts, with rear yards as opposed to gardens and with front doors still opening directly onto the street.



Nos 19-25 Ritchie Street demolished in the summer of 1978

Similar demolition works occurred at Fife Street, Ayr Street and one side of Bute Street between 1981 and 1987 and a scheme to build 53 new homes was designed. Management Committee Minutes of May 1989 capture the feeling at the time: **“Plans had been submitted and accepted some 5 or 6 years ago for redevelopment of this area. Regrettably and most unfortunately the constant putting back of approval to proceed on the site with this project had resulted in the area concerned being a major dump and not unnaturally residents living on the perimeter who had to suffer the conditions imposed were angry and resentful that they had ever given their approval for the demolition of houses and the clearance of the area concerned”.**

However, the Housing Executive concluded that the degree of unmet housing need in the area was insufficient to justify redevelopment of the site so it remained vacant during the 1990's, as did the adjoining British Gypsum site.

Enveloping schemes, financed by the NI Housing Executive and administered by Grove HA, were also a result of the Housing Action Area status. Designed to target owner occupiers and private landlords, typical work, without charge, included rebuilding chimney stacks; re-slating; renewing gutters, downpipes, windows and external doors; cleaning and repointing brickwork and rebuilding front garden walls. It was hoped that as well as preventing houses from deteriorating that with this external work done, owners and landlords would claim Improvement Grants to renovate internally as well. The first phase “enveloped” houses on St Vincent Street, St Aubyn Street and a number of properties on Keadyville Avenue. The second phase covered Pittsburg Street, Arosa Parade, Glasgow Street and the remainder of Keadyville Avenue.



Nos. 2-14 St Vincent Street rebuilt

The Grove area of North Belfast has been home to **Margaret Whitten** since 1952 when she and her husband purchased a house in Mineral Street for the sum of £300. Margaret recalls making a number of improvements to the property, including putting in a bathroom: “It was great having the toilet inside the house instead of having to go out to the yard, especially in the wintertime”.

In 2004, Margaret moved to her current home in the Arosa development but she was sad when her old house was then demolished. “I had everything I needed in it, all my memories are in my old house, including those of my late husband”. Margaret was a familiar face at Grove Housing Association for many years as she was employed as the office cleaner until her retirement in October 2001. Now at 90 years of age Margaret still remains an active figure within the local community.



Margaret Whitten (centre) pictured on the occasion of her retirement from Grove HA with General Manager, Lottie McGrath (left) and Gloria McClean, Housing Officer (right).

Whilst registration with the Department of the Environment gave access to the Housing Association Grant (HAG), it also brought with it very close management of all renovation and new development work. Permission had to be sought to appoint particular consultants; to demolish or repair houses; to approve plans; to go out to tender; to approve tenders; to report final costs and to approve rents etc. The many forms included the appropriately named HASL forms. Processes were slow, but without this grant assistance nothing could have been achieved.

“Traditional” funding applied until 1992. This meant that if the rents for a scheme of renovated or newly built homes produced an annual income that was greater than what the Department considered appropriate for their upkeep, a loan was created to repay the excess income over a 30 year period. Grove's last loan of this type expires in 2021.

The Housing (NI) Order 1992 created a very different form of funding. A grant rate was set when a scheme was approved. For example, if the rate was set at 60%, the housing association then had to find the remaining 40% of the cost by taking out private loans from banks or other financial institutions. These loans have to be repaid, so housing associations were permitted to set their own rent levels to cover normal housing costs and meet these repayments. Despite the Committee's initial concerns over borrowing large sums of money, the advantage of this ‘mixed’ funding system is fewer approval stages and greater flexibility. Grove's first loan was £2.7m borrowed from Ulster Bank in 2006.

The oversight of the development programme was handed over to the NI Housing Executive in 2008, but the Department (now the Department for Communities) retains its role as regulator and inspector of registered housing associations.



The years leading up to and from the Millennium proved to be an industrious time for Grove Housing Association. Surveys had been conducted by the NI Housing Executive in 1994 and again in 1998 to determine the areas of greatest need. These had resulted in the creation of an Urban Renewal Area where the NIHE would vest all property and land from Bute Street to Mineral Street, apart from a few established properties on the York Road.



Work is completed on the Grove Court Scheme

This included a total of 158 properties belonging to Grove HA. With Habinteg Housing Association acting as Grove's agent, the "Grove Urban Renewal Area" Scheme delivered 50 new houses at the long vacant site at Fife Street, Ayr Street and Bute Street. A total of eight bungalows were also built on vacant sites at Ivan Street and Ritchie Street. Construction commenced in October 1999 and took two years to complete.

The British Gypsum site had also been vested and was sold along with half of Arosa Parade to T&A Kernoghan to develop for housing. Although construction took longer to start than had been originally anticipated, the 54 house scheme was completed during 2003-04. The new housing development retained the original Arosa name, evolving into Arosa Parade, Park and Crescent. In order to meet housing need, a total of 40 of these new properties were purchased by Grove Housing Association.

The 'garage site' between Ritchie Street and Ayr Street was also purchased by the NIHE and transferred to Grove to build 17 houses in the Grove Court Scheme, with work eventually being completed on the scheme in 2006. That year ended with the completion of six new houses on the former Rite Price site between Harrisburg Street and Mineral Street. Additionally, with everyone rehoused, the cleared site from Arosa Parade to Mineral Street had been sold by the Housing Executive to a private developer. The site eventually came into the ownership of Donard Homes who gradually introduced 98 new homes between 2007 and 2014.



New homes at Arosa Crescent

Housing standards have changed considerably over the years. The first rehabilitation scheme in 1979 provided an enclosed smokeless coal 'room heater' and only three radiators. Later schemes changed to room heaters that could provide full central heating. However, due to safety concerns about fires and their flues, Grove Housing Association fitted Economy 7 heating to a total of 150 homes in 1994. This proved expensive to run and initially the electricity network could not provide the power required to service the properties.



Work gets underway to No. 11 St Aubyn Street in March 2000

Preparations were made for further major improvements, with BIH lending administrative support. In 2000/01 second rehabilitations were carried out to 13 houses in St Aubyn Street. The rest of Grove's rehabilitated and new build homes had major repairs carried out at the same time with double glazed uPVC windows being fitted, new kitchen units provided, gas central heating installed, improved insulation and other work as necessary. Phoenix Gas had arrived in the province in 1996, and the development of the gas network provided natural gas as an alternative form of heating. Again the cost of this work was part funded by grant assistance and part funded by Grove HA.

Traditionally housing associations had been allowed to sell homes to tenants, but this was a complicated process and it was not always financially viable for Grove HA to do so once discount was given and grant aid repaid.



Glasgow Street benefits from major roofing repairs

and grant would not need to be repaid. VPG and the sale price less allowable costs, were then put in a Disposal Proceeds Fund which had to be used to purchase other dwellings. Between the years 2000-07, a total of 19 homes were sold under the new policy and nine were purchased. Unfortunately, house price inflation put the cost of house prices out of reach for many buyers, then recession made borrowing more difficult, so only one property has been sold since.



No 149 York Road bought with house sales proceeds and 147 York Road bought as part of the 2008 purchase scheme



Five existing houses in reasonable condition were purchased in 2008. The Victorian terrace from 2-36 Ivan Street had not been included in the redevelopment, but the houses were small and either required further work or demolition. Residents had been rehoused by 2006, but the terrace had been well raided by the ‘brick bandits’ (unofficial brick recyclers) and it was properly demolished at the end of that year. Following the acquisition of additional land, and with Departmental approvals in place, Grove proceeded with plans for a new 10 house scheme which was completed in 2010. This was the first Grove scheme to meet the Code for Sustainable Homes standard.

There were still a number of houses locally that had been derelict for many years. Grove tried to purchase them all, but was only able to buy 163 York Road and 6 Keadyville Avenue, which were renovated in 2012, along with an unimproved house at 141 Shore Road.



Properties at 2-8 Ivan Street before demolition in 2006



The new 2-8 Ivan Street

In the same year, the “retrofit” and renovation of 9 St Vincent Street was also completed. This was a grant aided research project to see what could be done with a Victorian terrace house. It was the first house in Europe to meet the ‘Active House’ modernisation (retrofit) requirements and it was the winner of DECC/BRE ‘Domestic Retrofit Project of the Year 2012’. CO2 emissions were cut by 86% and weekly average energy costs reduced from about £30 to £4.50.

Whilst no large improvement projects have been carried out more recently, the Association has added roof space insulation through the Cosy Homes schemes and has been replacing gas boilers that have reached the end of their lifespan with new, energy efficient models. Regular painting and other maintenance schemes have also been conducted.



A new roof for the ‘retrofit’ at 9 St Vincent Street

### LIFE IN GROVE - A TENANTS’S PERSPECTIVE

“Salt of the earth”. That’s how Fife Street resident **Bill Eaton** describes the people of Grove - family, friends and acquaintances - that he has known for a lifetime. It is obvious that Bill takes an immense pride in the area where he was born and has spent his adult life, turning down the opportunity to move to Canada to remain true to his roots in the area that the locals call “Little Scotland”, a nod to the Scottish street names. A former Chairperson of Grove Tenants Association, a role which he describes as both an honour and a pleasure, and a former Vice-Chairperson of Grove Housing Association, Bill spent his childhood at No. 37 Fife Street, attending Grove Primary School and earning some spare cash by delivering newspapers from his aunt’s shop from the age of seven. He has fond memories of happy times spent in his grandmother’s house where there was always a cup of tea on the boil, and can still recall being sent to fetch the nurse who lived at the top of Alexandra Park Avenue only to have to run back home whilst she drove past him in her car. As Bill reflects: “The Grove area that you see today has been achieved by the people who live in it. I remember houses being demolished and the land that lay vacant was used by the BBC for film sets until building work commenced. Grove was and still is a great community and when people moved into their new homes they kept the same neighbours and those bonds have lasted a lifetime”.



Grove URA development - Fife Street

Grove Housing Association responded to community concern when it acquired and developed the derelict site at the corner of Shore Road and Skegoneill Avenue after it was vested by the NI Housing Executive. Despite significant design difficulties with the site, Grove Housing Association persevered with its plans and in February 2013 work was completed on a block of 4 corner apartments and 5 three bedroom houses, all built to high energy efficient standards. The Loughview development was officially opened by the Social Development Minister on 7th February, 2014 and the commitment of Grove HA, the team of consultants and the contractor to the delivery of this scheme was formally recognised when Grove Housing Association was presented with the Department for Social Development Regeneration Award by the Royal Society of Ulster Architects that same year.



The Loughview development pictured from the Shore Road



Grove Housing Association was originally located in a three storey house at 139 York Road but as time progressed it was felt that a new home for Grove HA was required. With the help of an Urban Development Grant, work on the current office at 171 York Road was completed in 2003, greatly improving facilities for tenants, staff and committee members.

Grove's first member of staff, Chris Williamson, recalls the premises at 139 York Road: **"Instead of holding chilly Committee Meetings by lamplight in an unimproved house in Glasgow Street, we enjoyed the luxury of meeting in a warm office with electric light"**.

A report on the progress of the new offices recorded in the 2001-02 Annual Review reflects:

**"We are looking forward to moving to our new office early summer. This is part of the Grove regeneration strategy for the area, which will provide accommodation that will be in tune with the now quickly changing face of the neighbourhood. It will provide managed workspace as well as being tenant friendly, and we would take this opportunity of recording our gratitude for the urban redevelopment grant aid provided by DSD"**.



Grove HA's first office at 139 York Road



Under construction 2002 - A new home for Grove Housing Association



Committee members in 1999/2000 (back row) Kay Brown, Isabel Oliver, David Browne, Freda Eaton, Kathleen Browne (front row) Jacqueline Browne, Harry Wright (Chairperson), May Gyle

Grove Housing Association is committed to developing and promoting a positive working relationship with its tenants and the wider community. More recently the Board has made a conscious decision to become further involved in community activities in addition to fulfilling its housing duties and responsibilities. Last year Board members were instrumental in securing funding from Belfast City Council's Local Investment Fund and the Alpha Programme, which comes from landfill tax, to develop a Community Garden at the end of Ritchie Street and Ivan Street. This project has seen extensive work carried out on the construction of a polytunnel, raised vegetable/flower beds, and planters. A new mural now graces the railway wall and a fresh purpose has been given to this previously underused area of land.



Grove's Christmas Party 2015 for local residents

Treasurer Mark Shields was the main organiser of a Christmas party for local residents in December 2015 and the office is being more widely used by outside groups and is providing a vital point of contact for organisations and local representatives.

#### A WORD FROM THE MP

"Grove Housing Association has played a vital role in the life of our local community for many years. By providing good quality and affordable homes, Grove Housing has helped to ensure a stable and good quality life for all of its tenants. What makes Grove Housing so unique and so important to our area is the wider community role that it plays, and I hugely admire the Association's commitment to strengthening and empowering our community. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate all the Board members, staff and tenants who have helped to ensure that Grove Housing has been a success and offer my best wishes and continued support long into the future".

**Nigel Dodds OBE, Member of Parliament for North Belfast**



The Community Garden and Mural

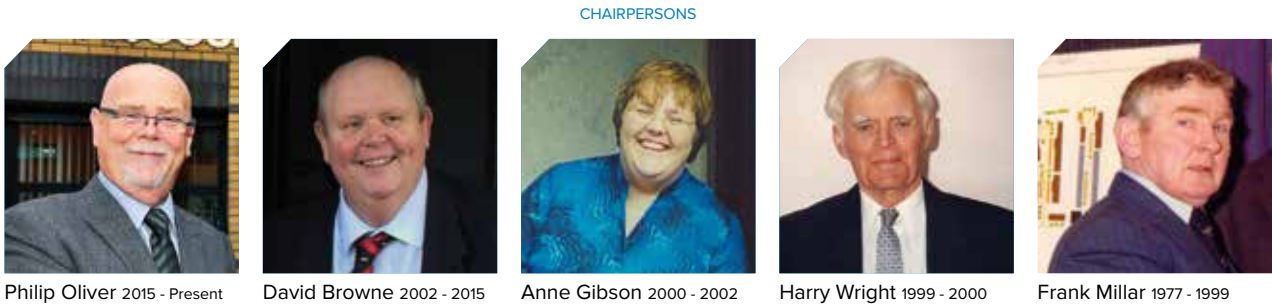


“Committed local lay people are vital to the success of a community-based housing association.”

THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

- Philip Oliver - Chairperson
- Alderman David Browne MBE - Vice Chairperson
- Greer Ferguson - Treasurer
- Ian Hackney
- Erskine Holmes OBE
- Amanda Johnston
- Colm McGarry
- Denis Bleakley - Secretary

When Grove Housing Association was first formed, Frank Millar chaired a Management Committee of residents whose local knowledge guided the Association in improving the area. After many years of service, he stepped down as Chairperson in 1999 and a new group of local people came on to the Committee, providing fresh impetus to the Association. Some of the new Members had been part of the Tenant’s Association. Long-serving Harry Wright became Grove’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Chairperson, then Anne Gibson who was succeeded by David Browne. The position of chairperson is currently held by Philip Olivier. More recently the increased regulatory requirements have required a greater emphasis on members of the Board, as it is now called, having professional skills and there has been less emphasis on living locally.



The Board of Grove Housing Association - Denis Bleakley (Secretary); Colm McGarry; Erskine Holmes; Philip Oliver (Chairperson); David Browne (Vice-Chairperson); Amanda Johnston and Ian Hackney. Missing from photograph Greer Ferguson (Treasurer)

- Denis Bleakley - General Manager
- Laura Kerr - Housing Officer
- Heather Carmichael - Finance/Admin Officer
- Sarah McCall - Housing Assistant

The work of Grove Housing Association was primarily carried out by the Committee and by Erskine Holmes when it was first registered as an Industrial and Provident Society in 1976. The Association had no money and no staff of its own until it was registered with the Department of the Environment in May 1977 and only then did the Association have access to finance.

With the registration process complete, and with resources now available, Grove Housing Association was able to employ its first member of staff, Chris Williamson, as a Development Officer in October 1977. The staff quota was later expanded to two, by the appointment of a part-time Secretary/Book-keeper.

Mr Williamson remained with Grove Housing Association until his departure in 1981 when he was replaced by Archie Harvey. In time, Mr Harvey was succeeded by Lottie McGrath who remained the senior member of staff until her retirement in 2003. Following Lottie’s departure, her position was filled for a short time by Andrew Aiken and then by Denis Bleakley who is the current General Manager, having joined Grove Housing Association in 2005.

Other staff who have served with distinction for long periods include Gloria McClean, who recently retired after 30 years of service, Gail (Nixon) Hanna and Heather Carmichael. Sharon Longman continues as office cleaner and Laura Kerr was welcomed this year as the new Housing Officer.

“I appreciate leading Grove’s current staff in working to provide good homes for people in this community and continuing to build on the legacy of those who have gone before us”.

Denis Bleakley *General Manager*



Denis Bleakley (General Manager)



Grove staff members (l-r) Sarah McCall, Denis Bleakley, Heather Carmichael and Laura Kerr





St Aubyn Street pictured in September 2001



Pittsburg Street in September 1979



No. 63 Glasgow Street – the first property acquired by Grove HA



The old 'garage' site between Ritchie Street and Ayr Street



Architect Graham Spence gets to work on Ritchie Street



Ivan Street in the late 1970's



Nos. 30-40 Harrisburg Street pictured in March 1980



Loughview site before being developed



No. 163 York Road before it was purchased by Grove HA



Grove URA development - York road



Life on Bute Street in the 1970's



Fife Street bonfire 1997



# *thank you*

Thank you to everyone who has shared in and contributed to the Association's journey over the past 40 years.

## **WITH PARTICULAR THANKS TO...**

- All the residents for putting up with the disruption, building work, vacant houses and sites over the years
- The Committee/Board members and staff who have worked tirelessly to improve the area and to help residents with their problems and concerns
- The contractors and consultants whose hard work and expertise has helped to build and maintain the area for the past 40 years
- The Department and the NI Housing Executive who have provided funding for Grove's work and for their oversight of it

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